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A SPANISH NOVELIST

Saul seeking his father's asses and finding himself king has usually passed as an example of the lucky accident, philosophers to the contrary; but an accident of my own was luckier, and in this the philosophers would agree. In my vagabond student days in Rome I bought and carried in my pocket an Italian-Spanish grammar, with purely philological designs on the Spanish language. The next summer I stumbled upon Armando Palacio Valdés's *El Cuarto Poder*, a novel so delightfully fresh and full of interest that it drew in its train during the succeeding years all of Valdés's own works, and many of the works of other contemporary Spanish writers—Valera, Galdós, Alarcón, Pereda, the Countess Emilia Pardo Bazán, Blasco Ibáñez, Valle-Inclán, Baroja, Ruiz, Unamuno. Seeking philological asses, I found myself monarch in new Realms of Gold. The modern Spanish novel is a rich field of interest; besides being a well-told story and one of the world's finest examples of realism, it possesses the added advantage, especially for the English and American reader, of reflecting nature and human life in a land whose very name has always cast a spell over the imagination.

The contemporary Spanish novel is to be called a revival of Spanish fiction. During the century after Cervantes, who died in 1616, Spanish letters meant drama. The eighteenth century was likewise barren of fiction, and the first half of the nineteenth passed with little save a few imitations of Scott. It was not until the seventies that the revival, which had already begun in the long career of Fernán Caballero, and in the first

few works of Pereda, Alarcón, Galdós, and Valera, began to be noticed.

The novel in our land, says Valdés with sparkling humor in 1878, is at present nothing but a vast and uncultivated field in which spring here and there a flower or two with red and lustrous petals, in the midst of abundant growths of fodder plants. But the soil can produce novels. On this point there is no room for doubt. The last works of the geological map commission prove this in a conclusive manner.

Let us go up into one of the loftiest sierras in our peninsula. Will that not do? Then let us go up into an ideal sierra and thence take observation.

Toward the South the sun is larger and more golden, the spaces of the sky more azure and diaphanous. Scattered everywhere you look, in the midst of vineyards and orange gardens, are hundreds of white-shining villages, bathed in transparent, luminous vapor, and intoxicated with the perfumes of a quick and ardent vegetation. In the air flit irised butterflies; the earth teems with a high-spirited, high-strung, happy-hearted people, making love at the grating, inventing the phrase of endearment and bravado, storming at their saints and then kissing their feet, laughing and weeping without motive, sighing in the midst of their song; a people with black eyes, a hospitable, free-spoken, proud people, who have performed deeds of prowess by the thousand and who relate them by the million, who love God and woman above all things, and who bite off half the Castilian idiom.

In the North, there appears a sky that is heavy, yet of sweet and delicate tints. A canopy of clouds hangs there, that intercepts and makes captive the rays of the sun so that they descend to earth all languid and with fond caress. Valleys and hills, and all that the vision embraces, are verdant. On the hills grow trees that detain the mists, in the valleys grow grasses and wind the streams. Drops of water are constantly suspended high in air, on the trees, on the grass, on the roofs of dwellings. The sea is rough and foaming, the sky capricious and melancholy, the earth gentle and gracious. There, live a people who toil like beasts of burden and meditate like philosophers, a spiritual people and sensitive who live on corn bread, who see fantasms and witches in the night, who die on the field of battle for an idea, who tremble in the presence of the clerk of court; a

sensible, patient, melancholy people, who would be very poetic if better nourished, who possess as no other the virtue of not saying this mouth is mine.

Both of these peoples hold in keeping in their life precious novels which they have not cared to show to travellers of the frivolous sort. But when Galdós and Valera came to demand them, we all saw with what singular courtesy they behaved.

The hour, besides, is now timely and decisive. The fruit is yellow on the tree, and waits for nothing but a slight shaking to fall into our hands. The ancient and very original customs of our land are disappearing, and offer as they die away the poignant and melancholy interest of all things which have been and soon will cease to be. If we do not profit by these moments, the culture of the modern day will gird about our members the close uniform that hides the peculiar, the original, and the characteristic, and soon it will not be so easy to perceive it.

Prepare yourselves, then, ye who feel stirring in your souls the inspiration of art, put the pen behind your ear, set in order your sheets, board the express, scatter yourselves throughout the peninsula. Not long will you be in returning, I clearly see, with health in your cheeks and the Spanish novel under your arms.

The critic's exhortation was heeded—rather, his prediction came true. The inspired did appear, with the Spanish novel under their arms, and, for the most part, with the health in their cheeks that augured well for the character of the burden. Juan Valera, the genial Juanito, man of the world and charming conversationalist, ambassador to many capitals, including Washington, added to *Pepita Jiménez* and *El Comendador Mendoza* the series of tales whose elegant diction, classic style, and suavely sympathetic content disarm the critic. Galdós, the Canary Islander, in some sort a spectator in Spain, who had already achieved a reputation in *Doña Perfecta*, a novel touching clericalism, continued in the well-known *Marianela* and *Gloria*, and others, and in the torrential output of *Episodios Nacionales*, an endless epic of the national life of nineteenth-century Spain now numbering more than two score lengthy novels, loosely connected or unconnected, teeming with characters and incidents historical, semi-historical, and purely im-

aginative. Alarcón added to his *Cuentos* and the immortal *Sombrero de Tres Picos* his other less famous works. Pereda, so far known chiefly as the writer of *Escenas Montañesas*, added to these sketches of the northern mountains and their people his picturesque novels of Cantabrian life. Valdés himself began, in the very year he was publishing his critical *Semblanzas Literarias*, the succession of novels and sketches, localized for the most part in Asturias, whose latest appeared only three years ago. The Countess Pardo Bazán wrote her novels of Galician life, besides numerous books on historical, religious, and critical subjects, including a work on realism, *La Cuestión Palpitante*. Leopoldo Alas, the critic, known as Clarín, wrote *La Regenta*, a psychological novel with mystical motive. Even Miguel de Unamuno, the brilliant thinker who sits in the rector's chair at Salamanca, produced two novels—*Paz en la Guerra* and *Amor y Pedagogía*. About 1894, there sprang into fame the restless, combative, volcanic Vicente Blasco Ibáñez—Valencian, admirer of Goya, republican and socialist, creator and editor of *El Pueblo*, fictional father of strenuous and indomitable heroes in lost causes, brilliant painter of local color, rough and uneven, often sensational, sometimes vulgar, but always enthusiastic and never failing to interest.

Besides these, who have been most in the public eye, there are more recent names whose significance cannot as yet be estimated—Martínez Ruiz, known as Azorín, author of *La Voluntad*, a deeply thoughtful work hardly to be called a novel; Pio Baroja, a photographic realist who, like Ruiz, is thinker and analyst first, and novelist second; Ramón del Valle-Inclán, a Galician of exquisite poetic style who is sometimes unpleasantly like D'Annunzio; and Ricardo León of Malaga, another stylist, whose characters and scenes, like those of Ruiz, are Castilian. In all of these, who are of the younger generation, the art of the novel is prejudiced by too much attention either to analysis or to style. The fine vigor and sanity of the older writers are wanting. "There should be no plot," says a character in Ruiz's *La Voluntad*; "life itself has no plot: it is varied, many-formed, floating, contradictory—everything except symmetrical, geometrical, rigid, as it appears in novels."

And not only did the novelists arise, as Valdés foresaw, but they arose in east and west and south and north. Few countries are more universally portrayed in fiction.

There is thus a great deal to justify the assertion of Aubrey Bell (*The Magic of Spain*, London, 1912) that "since 1874 scarcely a year has passed without producing a Spanish novel that deserves a high rank in literature." And when account is taken of the whole of Spain's contribution to letters, it may be granted that there is some excuse for the declaration of one of the Spanish authors themselves: "Depend upon it, if Spain possessed as many ships and cannon as England, France, or Germany, her literature would be considered the first in the world."

I.

Of all the galaxy of Spanish novelists, the one who has pleased me most and taught me most about the life of Spain is Armando Palacio Valdés, the Asturian, born the fourth of October, 1853, at Entralgo, one of the diminutive clusters of houses that make up Spain's five or six thousand villages.

Señor Valdés is still living, and resides in Madrid, except the summer months; which he passes at Cap Breton in France, in the Châlet Marta y María, so called after his second novel. Mr. Howells, who had enjoyed an epistolary acquaintance with him for twenty years or so, came finally to know him in person during a visit to Spain in 1912, and was kind enough, early in the following year, to send me a letter of introduction to him. I found him a person of medium size, somewhat slender and with a very slight stoop, and quick and agile manner. His gray hair, which was never black, is somewhat sparse, and the full beard, not closely trimmed, is also gray. Large, open blue eyes and a generous mouth with good teeth give instant impression of a personality ingenuous, affable, gentle, and sympathetic. "You will find him all you could wish him to be for gentleness and wisdom," said Mr. Howells in the note that accompanied the letter.

From Madrid to Entralgo is three hundred and sixty miles. You ride up and over the Sierra de Guadarrama, cross the plains of Old Castile, through Medina del Campo and Valladolid, and

perhaps stop at León to see Spain's most beautiful cathedral, getting up next morning at four to traverse the province of León on the way to the Cantabrians. At a certain station in a deep valley watered by a mountain stream, there appear suddenly, for the first time, wooden shoes raised high on three iron pegs, one under the heel and two under the ball of the foot, and you are in the rainy part of Spain. You climb to 4,215 feet, pierce the mountain chain by a two-mile tunnel, and emerge looking down into the narrowest and most precipitous valleys you have ever seen, almost bottomless in the dawn, and across them to distant peaks and ridges in mingled clouds and snow already showing gold and silver from a just rising sun. The next station is only seven miles away, but it is 2,515 feet lower, and it takes twenty-six miles of winding about precipices, over bridges, and through fifty-eight tunnels, to reach it. Twenty-eight miles more, and you reach Oviedo, the capital of Asturias, in the valley of the Nalón, warm, rainy, fruitful, green, with wonderful hills and mountains all about, among which, too, not far distant, is Entralgo. Eighteen miles away, on the coast, is Gijón, where the remnants of the Armada came reeling in, and ten miles west of it, on an inlet, is Avilés.

The novelist's father, Don Silverio Valdés, was an advocate, and his mother came of a landholding family. They left the Entralgo estate in his infancy, and removed to Avilés, where he received his youthful education. At ten, he was sent to school in Oviedo. At the age of seventeen, after graduation from the University of Oviedo, he went to Madrid, where he studied law and social science, first with a legal career in mind, and then with the thought of a professorship in political economy.

But he felt the call of letters. Already in 1885, at the age of twenty-two, he became editor of the *Revista Europea* at Madrid, contributing articles on economics, history, and literature which were still in course in 1878. In 1881, at the age of twenty-eight, he shares with Leopoldo Alas in the publication of a critical volume, *La Literatura en 1881*, and in the same year goes to his native village and writes his first novel, *El Señorito Octavio*. In 1883, on his thirtieth birthday, he is married to a sixteen-year-old Basque girl in the little village of Candás, a

few miles west of Gijón on the Cantabrian coast. In a year and a half the idyll is a thing of the past—the girl wife is dead, though for him she lives on through a little son.

Here is fit preparation for the novelist and the artist—provincial birth and rearing, university training in a provincial capital, a home among simple people in a grand environment of mountain and sea, study in the national capital, with intimate literary associations in university and Athenæum, wide contact with books and men, an editorship, a critical faculty well developed and disciplined by actual critical work, and a measure of financial independence. All this, with the deepest of life's experiences—love, marriage, birth, death—to fertilize it.

The scene of *El Señorito Octavio*, the first novel—not counting *Crotalus Horridus*, a tale published three years before in the *Revista de Asturias*—is laid in a moist and verdant valley deep among the Cantabrians. It is Entralgo itself. The daughter of a country householder, a sane, sound, faithful girl, comes back to the valley, after years of absence, with the brutally cruel aristocrat she married at her father's bidding, and falls in love with the friend of her childhood, at the same time unconsciously inspiring a foolish passion in the Señorito Octavio, a romantic youth already engaged to the village apothecary's daughter Carmen. The content is golden. You are made to feel the charm of Cantabrian valley, stream, and mountain; you participate in the task of field and fold. You spend summer days with the laborers in the hay, or with the Count and his country-bred wife at the villa, or in excursions on the mountain sides; you pass long winter evenings in the big living-room of the householder, where servants and neighbors gather to spin and knit and talk of *reales* and *pesetas* and crops and the neighborhood affairs, and all kneel for a long telling of the rosary before the friendly good-night; you make one among the company of village gossips, young and old, who come together in the social back room of the village store to indulge in a friendly game of cards for small stakes. Plot, character-drawing, language—all are simple, natural, unforced. Even the somewhat sensational ending, which the author is said to look back upon without entire satisfaction, is the conclusion of a perfectly natural sequence of events.

Two years afterward appeared the much more famous *Marta y María*, known to English readers as *The Marquis of Peñalta*. In Nieva, the Avilés of the novelist's boyhood, lives the Elorza family, in the fine old mansion on the principal thoroughfare—the well-to-do and much respected father, an invalid mother, a daughter, María, twenty years old, beautiful and accomplished, and Marta, her sister, fourteen years old, of budding womanly charm and home-keeping ways. María is betrothed to the thoroughgoing, manly, but somewhat ordinary young Ricardo, Marquis of Peñalta. At first returning his love, she gradually yields to a growing devotion to Christ and the cloister, for a time delays the marriage, then suggests Platonic affection, and finally proposes to her lover a betrayal of the government armor factory, of which he is custodian, to the Carlist plotters with whom her devotion to the Church has led her in secret to unite—a proposal which convinces him at last of the hopelessness of his passion. María is finally arrested and carried away, a serene and joyful martyr, but is soon released, returns to find her mother dying of the shock, and at last enters the cloister. The home-keeping, practical Marta has meanwhile blossomed into womanhood, and has grown to love the troubled, disconsolate, and none-too-keen-sighted Ricardo, who finally discovers her affection—and his own—to the joy of the lonely father.

You close this book feeling that all the life of a Spanish town has been displayed to you. You have mingled with the men and boys of Nieva waiting outside the Elorza home to hear María sing; have been taken into the drawing-room where the party to which she sings is assembled, and introduced to the society of Spanish people; have seen María's room and the tokens of her mystic inclinations; have gone to mass with her and heard a Spanish sermon, and have witnessed the growth of her æsthetic ideas and their culmination in the ecstasies of prayer and scourging; have made the young Marquis's acquaintance and learned of a Spanish boy's bringing up; have visited Marta in dining-room, kitchen, and garden, and seen a fine Spanish girl at her baking, sweeping, ironing, and making of bouquets; have made an excursion to the island outside the bar, with a big picnic dinner in a villa on the rocks, and much merriment

coming and going; have witnessed María's arrest, and made the night march with her to the provincial capital, and seen a stubborn old Carlist die, rifle in hand, defying a whole squad of soldiers; have seen the most impressive last sacrament administered to María's mother, and seen her death and carrying away; and have seen María take the veil, and disappear. The most ordinary things of life are here depicted, and with never-failing vivid interest. They are depicted faithfully and plentifully, yet the story never flags. If there is a forced note in the whole novel, it is only the exception that proves the rule.

A short passage will illustrate. Ricardo and Marta have ranged the entire house in search of the escaped canary, and have caught sight of him, through the attic window, on the tile roof outside.

"There he is, there's Menino!" cried Marta. "He's right near! Menino! Menino! Come here, stupid! Here! Here! Don't you know me?"

Menino, who was six or eight paces distant, at sound of his mistress's voice cocked his head to one side with a gracious movement to listen. The rays of the sun that fell full upon him bathed his yellow plumage, making him stand out in such wise on the red of the roof that he seemed a little piece of animated gold. He gave three or four jumps as if intending to go to Marta, and said *pi, pii*.

"Do you want me to get out and see if I can catch him?" asked Ricardo.

"No, wait a little. . . . He seems to be coming himself. . . . Menino! Menino! . . . Come here, you mischief! . . . Come here! Come!"

Menino gave three or four jumps more, approaching, and came to a standstill, again cocking his head to listen. It isn't easy to know what passed through his head then: something depraved and low and dishonoring to the race to which he belongs, it must have been; because, forgetting in one moment the affectionate attentions of his mistress, her continual caresses, the many chocolates she had shared with him, her presents of biscuits and copious horns of canary seed, with great indifference he plumed himself before her eyes, said *pi, pii* several times with a certain nonchalance, and then, spreading his wings, took his way through space to lose himself among the foliage of the neighboring gardens.

Marta sent up a cry of grief.

"*Dios mio*, he's gone!"

"He's gone?"

"Yes!"

"Very far?"

"Away out of sight!"

"Then, by George, we've done it!"

Ricardo went up to the window, and following the direction of the girl's finger, looked and looked again, until his eyes stuck out, without seeing a thing that was within a league of looking like a canary. When he turned his eyes toward Marta, he observed that over her cheek a tear was rolling.

"Aren't you ashamed to be crying for a bird, little stupid?"

"You are right," answered the girl, trying very hard to smile, and wiping away the tear with her handkerchief. . . .

"But I had come to love him just like a person. . . . You see. . . I had been taking care of him for three years. . . ."

In *El Idilio de un Enfermo*, not even the exception can be found. This, the simplest, and not the least charming, of all the novels of Valdés, is the story of a young man who leaves Madrid for a period to recover in a remote village among the Cantabrians the health lost in high living at the capital. We lodge with him at the home of his uncle, the village priest, attend mass and hear the quaint country sermon, talk with the curate as he robes and unrobes in the sacristy, associate with the villagers and peasants, attend a *romería* on the mountainside. We are introduced with him to the peasant family whose daughter, timid and charmingly wholesome, but strong of character, loses her heart to him, and is driven by her ignorant and brutal father, who would force her to marry a lewd old *indiano*—the term for a returned American—to run away from home. The young man's character—a mixture of good and evil, weak and undisciplined—is psychologically perfect. The little village is the author's own birth-place, but his pen is under strict control, and never strays.

In 1885 appeared a little volume of *Aguas Fuertes*, or *Etchings*, excellent specimens of artistic precision and restraint—and *José*, fresh with the breezes of the Bay of Biscay where they blow on the little fishing village of Candás, the home of the young wife who died that year. *José* is the acme of simplicity,

both in structure and content, and a beautiful example of the author's gift of sympathy with nature and with men. It has been translated into eight languages, and is used in American colleges. *Solo*, in the same volume, contains one of the finest little boys of four years I have ever met in fiction.

In 1886 came *Riverita*, soon to be followed by its sequel, *Maximina*. Both have an autobiographical basis; *Riverita* is Valdés, and *Maximina* the wife who had died in 1885, at eighteen, after a year and a half of wedded life. There are more persons in these pages, and the construction is not so simple, but the character-drawing is excellent, and the humor delightful. The claim of mere humanity is triumphant here. The old, old experiences of love, marriage, birth, death, and the memories they leave, are treated with a depth and a sympathy that make them once more new. And the loves of *Maximina* and *Riverita* have no background of verdant valley or snowclad mountain, none of the usual accessories of love and mating in novels. This, as a Spanish critic says, "is an idyll of the home, an idyll of ingenuous love in a second-story flat, right, of an apartment house." Those who have read *Maximina* will not wonder that Spanish husbands and lovers place the book in the hands of wives and *novias* as a new portrayal of *La Perfecta Casada*.

In *El Cuarto Poder*, printed in 1888, we are again in a seaport town. The author's ease and sense of humor are increasing. A young engineer is engaged to the plain, homely daughter of a local magnate of the middle class, and her coquettish younger sister steals away his affections, only to betray him after marriage and cause his suicide. Valdés's humor is frequently satirical, and here, among the bourgeois of the small Spanish town, finds much to laugh at—their family life, their social evenings, their business, their diversion in the village theatre and festival, their political ambitions, with all the ludicrous animosities they engender and all the vulgarities they bring to light. It is Horatian satire; you laugh at human weakness, yet without loss of sympathy for it.

La Hermana San Sulpicio appeared in 1889. In this Valdés leaves his native scenes and transports us to Andalusia, to Seville, city of the Cathedral and the Guadalquivir, city of narrow,

white-walled, almost Moorish streets and verdant, fragrant courts, city of life and light and heat and music and flowers and love—to Seville, the *Sultana del Mediodia*. Never was city so charmingly and so completely set forth to the reader—Seville of the streets and Seville of the home, Seville along the river, in park and promenade, in country villa, Seville in café and theatre and Seville in the Triana among the gallants and the poor, Seville by day and Seville by night. Yet not a line is tedious, and the book is a real and fascinating story. It is a realist who writes, but also a poet with vision clear as crystal:—

The deserted and melancholy atmosphere vibrated now no more with the least sound: only from hour to hour of the evening the ponderous stroke of the bell in the Giralda startled it with metallic clamor. The Sultana of Andalusia gave herself into the arms of sleep, under her splendid canopy of stars. Within her precincts, none the less, Love ever waked. Even to the dawning, in the strait and mysterious windings of her streets, could be seen here and there the gallant, standing motionless with forehead close against some grating.

Gloria, a young nun at the wish of her mother, but without vocation, whose pledge will expire in a month, is the Hermana San Sulpicio of the story, an Andalusian girl all brightness and life—"made of lizards' tails," as her irritated mother says. A Galician, with temperament contrasting in every way—Galician is the Spanish for slowness—is her lover, with a rival in a hard-headed, unpoetic young man from Malaga who misplaces his lips and spits through his teeth. To free Gloria from the mother who would force a renewal of her vows, to secure her property interests, and to marry her, are the tasks which confront the lover. The course of true love maintains its reputation in commendable manner; there are jealousies, reconciliations, intrigues, and quite the proper number of difficulties. It is not a very intricate story, though its pages present a great number and variety of characters, but it is a good story, well distributed, and Seville is turned inside out for the reader, so to speak, without his being conscious of having read description at all. The book teems with sparkling Andalusian incident:—

The sky communicated its joy to the city, and the city communicated it to the heart of him who trod her streets. Through the big windows with their gratings my eyes explored without hindrance the interiors of her habitations. In one, there sat sewing two girls dressed in white, with roses in their hair. On observing the insistent gaze which I directed toward them, they smiled with roguishness. In another, a girl was playing the piano, with back toward the street: I stopped a moment to listen to her, and with me a woman of the people, who, putting her face to the grating, called out:—

“Señorita, Señorita!”

The girl turned, asking: “What is it?”

“Nothing, Señorita, . . . that I liked you from behind, and wanted to see whether from in front——”

“And how do you like me from in front?” answered the girl, as if all were a matter of course.

“Like a rosebud, my heart’s delight.”

“Thanks, ever so much!”

And she tranquilly turned to resume her playing. I went on my way with a smile.

In 1890 and 1892 appeared *La Espuma* and *La Fe*, the former a novel of Madrid high life called by French critics themselves a French novel with Spanish accessories, the latter a novel with a mingling of French and Spanish characteristics. In 1893, *El Maestrante*, with scene at Oviedo; in 1894, *El Origen del Pensamiento*, the story of a crack-brained old man, in pretentious middle-class setting, who sought to discover the origin of thought by experiment upon his grandchild, spirited away for the purpose; in 1896 *Los Majos de Cádiz*, a story of the bowery life of Cadiz; in 1899, *La Alegría del Capitán Ribot*, with Valencian setting, portraying the victorious moral struggle of a man brought much into contact with the wife of a slowly dying friend, called by its author “an eternal protest against the adultery of the French novel,” taken little to heart by the incorrigible French themselves, and appealing very little to English and American readers either as a protest or as a struggle; in 1903, *La Aldea Perdida*, a lyric story of Cantabrian village life, with an undercurrent of sadness at the threatened decay of its joyous picturesqueness before the advance of the railway and

modern industry; in 1906, *Tristán, o el Pesimismo*; in 1911, *Papeles del Doctor Angélico*, a volume of essays, sketches, and stories—these complete the list of Valdés's published works.

"And do you intend to continue writing?" he was recently asked.

"I can tell you nothing more at present than that I am resting," he replied, "and that for all the gold in the world I would not take up my pen. Will I persist in this inactivity? I have no plan formed. It is possible I shall write something—perhaps some scientific book, for there is where my interest is deepest now. I agree with Schopenhauer, that one ought not to write when he has nothing to say; and nothing occurs to me, just now, to say."

II.

Valdés's appeal has been wide. He has gone in translation to France, England and North America, Holland, Portugal, Germany, Sweden, Russia, and Bohemia, and in the original to the islands and South America. England and the United States, hearth-and-home-loving countries, and countries to whose imagination Spain has always appealed, have been his most cordial admirers abroad. He seems to have waited some time for popularity at home, and was not chosen to membership in the Spanish Academy until April, 1906, when he took the seat left vacant by Pereda's death. In the same month his fellow alumni of Oviedo organized a celebration in his honor, and published the letters and speeches then read and delivered. He has the reputation of never having written a line of fiction for love of money, and of never having indulged in anything that savored of advertising.

That Valdés is a realist is perfectly clear; his scenic and social backgrounds are real, his men and women solid and warm to the touch. That he is not the photographic, and sometimes unpoetic and vulgar, realist known to criticism as the naturalist, is quite as quickly apparent. He has unexcelled powers of observation, and never shrinks from the truth, but he selects. His is not the sort of realism that seems religiously bent on uncovering ugliness and letting loose the stenches of the world. In the sentence of George Meredith, he does

not mistake the muddy shallows for the depths of nature. His realism is idealistic.

In other words, Valdés is a poetic realist. He would agree with Valera: "The novel should be poetry, not history; that is, it should paint things not as they are, but fairer than they are, illuminating them with a light that casts over them a certain charm"—except that he would paint them, not fairer than they are, but in the fair aspect which they all possess for him who has eyes to see.

Still further, he is not only a realist, and a poetic realist, but an artist—an artist by temperament, by theory, and by practice. Some poets are not artists, and certainly many realists leave something to be desired. Never did a novelist follow more consistently for thirty-five years the ideal formulated in early youth. "The novel may serve, and always has served, a social end," he says, at twenty-five. "But I must inform you, for the satisfaction of certain literary scruples, that the novel is before all else a work of art, and that as such its first end is to realize beauty. The rest is obtained by way of addition. The novel, like any other work of art, may, though not necessarily because obliged, teach something. As a matter of fact, it constitutes a true power in our society, exercises a legitimate influence on our manners. . . . The task of the critic in this respect consists in observing in what manner this has been brought to pass. He must never forget that he is the defender of art against the excesses of passion or the invasion of the didactic spirit."

But there are many artists who display both thoughtfulness of detail and beauty of detail, and still fail of the highest art. The quality that makes of the poetic realist in Valdés a great artist is one most often and most lamentably lacking—the very simple quality of measure. Measure is the key to appreciation of Valdés.

There is measure in his pure and natural diction. He does not, like Valera, put the language of culture into the mouths of all his characters; nor, like Pereda, use provincialisms and dialect so freely that no one outside of his own province can read with ease. He is not an exquisite, like Valle-Inclán, nor can he be charged with carelessness, like Ibáñez. The copiousness and

rhetoric of southern Europe are no mark of his; yet he is conscious that prose, as well as poetry, is an artistic medium, and his language is remarkably smooth and fluent. Like all prose in whose composition the ear has played a part, it is pleasant to read aloud.

There is measure in his treatment of natural background. You might expect an Asturian to run riot in description of one of nature's most charming nooks; but the scenery is never allowed to cumber the stage or distract attention. It is important, but important chiefly as it serves to give relief to character and action. In this he is ancient classical: humanity is the all-absorbing interest, all else accessory. He is fully aware of the dangers of naturalism. The naturalistic school, he grants, has deserved great praise for tightening once more the bond between man and the exterior world, so long broken in literature; but it has abused its privilege. "The disciples of Flaubert," he says in the prologue to *Los Majos de Cádiz* in 1896, "have carried their love for description to such an extreme that characters and situations can scarcely be distinguished among the dense foliage. . . . The brilliant descriptions of the naturalists flatter the imagination by facilitating its action, but their novels rarely leave a profound impression on the spirit."

There is measure in Valdés's use of the details of daily life. Even in the works frankly entitled *Novelas de Costumbres*, the lines of the story are always made more distinct, never blurred or obscured, by the laying on of local color. His architecture is classical, never rococo or baroque. The ornament is beautiful, but subordinate. Social as well as scenic Spain is but a background to character. The Spanish home and its occupations, the Spanish street and its activities, the church, the shop, the village, and the *fiesta*, are not for themselves; they are part of the personalities of the people who appear in them. In *Marta y María* you are made to see most vividly the life of kitchen, dining-room, laundry, and garden, but it is really the character of the Spanish girl you contemplate all the time — Marta baking, Marta sweeping and dusting, Marta setting the table, Marta making bouquets. So blent with Marta in an inseparable whole is all the home that when the girl appears in the street the im-

pression is painful ; she is no longer natural, no longer graceful—she is no longer Marta. In *El Señorito Octavio*, all the while that you are being shown the country household life of the Cantabrians, it is Laura's character you are really learning.

As a result of this measured use of scenic and social accessories, there is measure in the length of his works. Few of them reach the average length of the English or American novel, and only one, *El Cuarto Poder*, appeared in two volumes. From detail to detail and episode to episode, the pen moves lightly and surely on, and you are through before you know it—too often, to your regret. "She'll vish there wos more," says Sam Weller, "and that's the great art o' letter-writin'."

Again, there is measure in his objectivity—in his keeping himself out the page, I mean. Valdés creates living people and sets them to acting. He does not discuss in words their motives or their thoughts, or criticise their conclusions. In this also he is a Greek. Rarely does a word escape him in the nature of personal opinion. You are not told, and you are not always sure, whether he is Catholic or free-thinker, republican or monarchist. If you have no doubt that Marta has chosen the better part, it is not because he says so, or because he condemns María. This does not mean that he is colorless. You are left with distinct impressions of his moral attitude. He is never-preachy : his novels are not "*libros de misa un poco romancescos*," as he characterized Fernán Caballero's; yet you are immediately sensitive to what Miguel de Unamuno calls "the aroma of honorable purpose and goodness of heart which emanate from them," and agree with him that Valdés is "one of the men who have given me pleasures the purest and most fruitful of my life."

There is measure in his attitude toward the problem novel: "To preach rebellion to the young, and particularly to the female sex, without fully justifying this unthinking struggle with society ; to let slip among the passionate impulses of the human heart a multitude of doubts whose examination could not seriously be carried to a conclusion within the labyrinths of a story, is, in my opinion, one of the characteristics which most disfigure and make dangerous the modern novel literature of France." There are, to be sure, problem novels among the

works of Valdés—even social, religious, and industrial problem novels, but the social and religious questions they propound are not sociological, not theological, not local, and are neither modern nor ancient. They belong to the human race. It is a tribute to Valdés's sense of art that the problem in his novel is not felt as such.

He is measured in construction of plot and portrayal of character. His plots are not only not improbable; they are hardly representations of the exceptional in life. They are well conceived, and their development wrought with sure and skilful hand; yet they are utterly simple, and their situations rarely unfamiliar. You will never see the *deus ex machina* in Valdés. His characters, too, are easily understood, and are rarely made to do the surprising or unexpected thing. Some few of them are wholly bad, and one of them, Maximina, is wholly good; but they are living figures, not types from melodrama. The great majority are so entirely human that the art of character-drawing never occurs to you. His women especially are fine, vigorous, healthy, wholesome types—Gloria, Carmen, Rosa, Maximina, Julia, Marta, and a dozen others—with red blood, good digestion, sane and sensible habits, and unquestioning faith and faithfulness. And the flesh is given its due; these women inspire the men they meet with physical, as well as with spiritual, passion. Yet rarely more than its due. From the French novel, its friends tell us, we must subtract, and to the English must add. With Valdés, you need do neither.

Finally, Valdés is measured in the difficult art of employing humor. Always in dangerous relation with distortion and absurdity, humor may easily defeat the ends of realistic art. The Spaniard in general is quick to see the ludicrous—perhaps because he is quick to see the real; and Valdés is chief among them. With a natural bent toward the humor of exaggeration, he often savors of Dickens; yet his humor in the main is of a more reasonable and quiet sort. It more resembles the genial, personal humor of Mr. Howells.

Measure means simplicity, on which I have dwelt, and unity and taste, of which specifically I have said little. In a word, Valdés's art at its best recalls the qualities that M. Henri Lechat

attributes to Attic art—measure, simplicity, distinction without effort, precision without hardness.

This feeling for measure, and for Hellenic quality in general, is no doubt a natural possession. Yet Valdés's art was made as well as born. After having discovered for himself his Greek affinity, I find that the Hellenic ideal has long, perhaps always, been in his consciousness. In the prologue to *Los Majos* he says: "To find a perfect harmony between background and figures and, in general, among all the elements of composition, we must go to the Greeks. They alone have possessed the secret of producing all the beauties of a piece without having one work harm to another, of portraying in art the profound harmonies which exist in the natural world."

III.

Somewhat for my own sake, but more for the sake of my author, I should greatly dislike being thought in my appreciation to have failed of that Hellenic measure which I praise so highly in him. The literary lover, as well as the more common sort, is likely to love in the object of his affection not so much the real individual as the ideal of the class. To cite a few instances of Valdés's fallibility would easily be possible. Some of his works are much better than others, and there are one or two which have added little to his fame. Once in a while he strikes a false note, and once in a while depicts a false situation—but only once in a while. Once in a very great while, too, the realist's device to motivate description of domestic or other detail becomes noticeable, and art is dangerously near to artificiality; for example, the escape of the canary, whose pursuit takes us through all the rooms of Marta's home. And once in a while the American reader will regret his author's freedom of speech.

A more serious failing lies in a certain slightness felt in some of Valdés's works. This may be what is meant by the assertion sometimes made that he is inferior to Galdós as a psychologist; or perhaps we should invoke another useful word, and say he lacks intensity. Yet I hesitate to say this. Measure, in the twentieth century, must pay the penalty of being misunderstood. Measure means calm and serenity, virtues not wholly appreciated in an

age when virtue means to shout and to run and to come to grips with much purpling of face and starting of eyes. The reader of the novel in general, and particularly the novel in northern Europe and America, is accustomed to unevenness, exaggeration, and even distortion. The northern is the novel of character, we are sometimes told, with the usual epigrammatical incompleteness, and the southern the novel of situation. Restlessness, vague longings, passionate yearnings, Titanic moral crises, fightings without and fears within, perspiration, tears, anguish—the reader expects all this, and looks for the novelist to describe it for him, and furnish an interpretation; and if all this isn't present, and enough of it to obstruct and obscure the action, and if he isn't obfuscated so much by description, he feels that somehow he has been cheated of his right to something deep. Real solidity and turbid obscurity have this quality in common, that they require an effort of the vision. Really clear matter and shallowness have in common the quality of being easily seen through. It is not so surprising, therefore, as it is unfortunate, that clearness is often confounded with lack of profundity, and mere muddiness with the deep things of God.

The depths of Valdés are calm depths, but they are depths. The love of man and woman, the love of children, the love of God, patriotism, pride, honor, joy, sorrow, pathos, hatred, despair—all the passions are quick in his pages, and the stirring scene that lives in the reader's memory is frequent. We may grant that he is not to be ranked with the world's greatest geniuses in the novel—with a Thackeray or a Balzac; yet there are qualities in which it would be hard to find any novelist equalling him, to say nothing of surpassing. For keenness of observation, for the artist's instinct in selection, for truth to nature and freedom from the improbable, for measure in every one of its literary manifestations, it is not too much to say that no novelist in Spain or anywhere else has written a half dozen novels that surpass the half dozen best from his pen. To read him even in English, with much of the aroma lost, is a rare pleasure, as the sale of two hundred thousand *Maximinas* testifies. To read him in his own delightful tongue is to participate in the life of Spain, and to thank the infinitely wise Author of all pleasures for the Tower of Babel and the accident of foreign language.

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